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WHAT DOES REVELATION REVEAL?

THE Bible above most, perhaps above all, books that have been written, has temperament. It piques, attracts, repels, confuses. It draws upon attention and patience. It disciplines negligence. It puts fine spurs to motive. One must take time to win the individuality of it. It is a liberal education to learn how to live with it.

The Bible is not a primer. It is no easy reading for beginners. The mere alphabet of either knowledge or feeling cannot fit a man to do anything better with this book than to take it (or leave it) on trust from his own moral instinct. "No man who knows nothing else," a scholar has told us, "knows even his Bible."

The Bible, we say, is a difficult book. This should be admitted fairly, in justice to it, to belief, and to believers. It is a powerful appeal to the emotions, but it is more than that. It is a strenuous influence upon conduct, but it is yet different from that. It is a challenge to the intellect of the race.

It is one of the signs of a successful book that the reader employs himself in thinking how he would have done it differently, and it would be a laughable problem in psychological algebra to estimate the number and kinds of persons who would like to show the Creator how to write His over again. How many of us, in the deep below the lowest deep that underlies sub-consciousness, believe that we could have made a better Bible than we possess?

Students of the subject have drawn a distinction familiar to most of us, between Revelation, Inspiration, and the Bible, but for convenience the term Revelation is used in this paper in its commonly accepted sense, as descriptive of that especial form of divine manifestation known to us as the Christian Scriptures.

The moment that a man undertakes to judge what he would do if he were a God, he must, of necessity, put God in the position of doing as if He were a man; but so far as we can assert what might, could, would, or should be possible to a supposed Creator in a case like this, we may say that, in extending such a revelation of His nature or purposes to us, God had two methods open to Him.

He might have selected the miraculous method. He might have inscribed truth upon the firmament, in eternal characters that the mind and eye of man should have been educated to interpret. The stars of heaven might have composed His awful alphabet; planet and comet and sun, nebula and meteor, might have formed and punctuated those mystical words; each heavenly body might, without interference with its individual destiny or value, have been by a divine freak so blocked out as to contribute to the formation of the magnificent characters which were to enlighten this small and ignorant planet that we happen to call our own. At twilight, men might have stood to watch the splendor of these hieroglyphs deepen down into the night, and read, "The heavens are the work of Thy fingers," where now they glance at the flaming frame-work of the southern cross; or spelled out, "God is love," where we idly follow Venus rising from the sea.

Or God might have uttered truth articulately to human ears. He might have taught the waves of the sea a celestial syntax to which terrestrial hearing should be attuned. The volcano might have been tamed to use His dread vocabulary. The sirocco and the cyclone might have spoken with an inexorable definiteness. Hail might have cried rebuke. Flowers might have whispered comfort. Birds might have sung of heaven. Men might have bowed to catch the least accent of the midnight wind in desert places, while it called: "Fear thou not, for I am with thee." Or we might have listened to the mighty lips of Niagara chanting, to what a musician claims to have discovered as the "Niagara chord," a *Gloria in Excelsis Deo* which the heart would have stood still to hear.

Or the awful veil between this and the unknown world might have been rent in twain. The mute lips of the grave might have moved. The dead might have answered to the wail of the ages. Our starved arms might have clasped them for the instant which would have been worth all agony.

"Oh, for five minutes with my Jean!" cried Carlyle, desolate upon his fame. Mystery could have relented and silence spoken, the famine of the heart been fed, the palsy of the faith been freed. We need not have beaten the breath of our souls out against the barred gates of death. "The touch of a vanished hand" could have set at rest our dreariest doubt forever. From the sealed lips of our dearest dead we could have learned, and never questioned after, who is the Resurrection and the Life.

One other method was open to God in extending a special revelation to man. He could act upon the legal fiber of the world. It was in His power to pursue a course of conduct in harmony with His own system; to act in accordance with laws which He had already established; to reach man by human means; to avoid, as far as possible, the shock and strain of admitting what we are accustomed, with great looseness of phraseology, to call higher laws; to neglect in the main the sporadic and the startling; to respect premise and conclusion, form and dignity; to select the orderly method of revealing, as He did the same in creating, as He does in preserving, as He has in governing. This He has selected. It will be found, I think, if we consider carefully, that He has adopted the natural method, with such emphatic distinctness as to leave us astonished at the *chiaro-oscuro* theories which theology has struggled to impel upon the credulity or reluctance of the world, as media of approach to a comparatively simple fact.

The Bible, in short, is not a miracle.

It is not too much to say that many, if not most, of the polemic mistakes made by the opponents of the Christian Revelation have their root in the assumption that it claims to be a miracle. Skeptical exegesis had the supreme opportunity of the century in her hands when the growth of modern thought struggled, like a Chinese child malformed in an earthen vase, against the distortion of the primitive theories of inspiration.

Instead of toiling with her mythical theory, her legendary theory, her naturalistic theory, her literary theory, dissent might have turned upon us and said: "Your Bible is not outside of law, but within it, and yet your Bible still." But, since unbelief lacks the constructive imagination, as well as the spiritual *præjudicium*, clearly necessary to such a result, it has been left for the slower but subtler scholarship of modern faith to give to

the world the only theories upon which it can hope a hundred years hence to keep any Bible at all.

It would be difficult to find another word in the language which has been so distorted as the word *inspiration*. It may belong to that series comprising God, the Soul, Immortality, of which it has been said that they never can present the same idea to any two minds; but let us take the liberty of doubting this, and say, rather, that inspiration offers as much fixity and definiteness to thought as any other kind of development can. What we call inspiration is a growth. It unfolds with history and like history. It is subject to evolution, like the race. It develops like the body, of which the particles undergo renewal every few years, yet it remains the same body still. What it was, it is and is not now. What it is it will, and yet it will not, be in fifty years.

In the matter of Biblical inspiration, if in any, we are to expect change as we have experienced it, in applied scholarship, in deepening wisdom, in spiritual illumination, and in the laws of interpretation as affected by these things and others not yet within the scope of our perception. There is no life without change. Inspiration is the breathing in of life. If the vital spark remain, the tissues of the inspiratory organs not only may change, but must change.

It would be as impossible for the thoughtful world to hold to-day that attitude toward the Bible which appears, for instance, in the Augsburg Confession, as it would have been for Solomon to write "*Butler's Analogy*," or for Noah to have built an elevated railway. But it would be equally impossible for the Bible to hold the same attitude toward the world. If it had proved an obstinate thing, it would now be an obsolete one. If there had been no moral elasticity in it, it would before this have been as dead as the worship of Moloch. Life is motion, renewal, promise. It is only death which does not stir. John Robinson, at Leyden, said one of the eternal things when he cried: "*There is more light yet to break from God's word!*"

Let us assume that the Bible is, above all things else, a natural book; that God, in designing it, followed that beautiful "*law of parsimony*" which is so justly dear to instructed human minds. Let us suppose that he chose the orderly form of communication in preference to the extraordinary, for reasons which appeal to our own intellectual standards; that he selected

natural illustrations of His purpose when He could, and fell back upon the supernatural only when He must; that it is incumbent upon us to bring to this book exactly the same qualities, as readers, which we should to any other important work; that it will bear the same, deserves the same, and demands the same; and that if these qualities are of the clearest mental and purest moral type, the book may stand or fall by their sentence, and ought to. I know of no other assumption which can fit a mind to approach a work presenting the claims of this. Precisely in proportion to the greatness of a call upon our credulity must we cultivate the impartial and dispassionate faculties upon whose healthfulness and energy the entire value of our conclusions rests. The church has often suffered herself to forget this simple law.

If the Bible is a natural book, it must be subject to natural rules of interpretation. If, as we noticed at the outset, it proves a sharp challenge to the human intellect, this argues nothing against its demands, but is rather so far in their favor.

It is not true, as we are in the habit of saying lightly, that all great things are simple. It is true that all really great things can be understood, but there is the grandeur of complexity as well as of simplicity. The arts make this very clear. Music has food for all kinds of human hunger. She never gives a stone for bread, though to the most earthy of natures. It is impossible to observe the faces in a great audience, listening to great music, without an awed sense of a power so diverse as to be almost divine. So the Bible is at once simple and complex: sufficiently intelligible to the untaught; sufficiently daunting to the thinker—who ought, therefore, the more to respect it. It has been compared to a stream, so deep that an elephant can swim in it; so shallow that a lamb could wade across it.

So science, again, dares her disciple on by difficulty. "Is it much for me," said Kepler, "that men should not accept my discovery? When the Almighty waited six thousand years for one to see what He had made, I may surely wait two hundred for one to understand what I have seen."

In all other forms of revelation, the more closely organized the material, the better instructed minds like it. One of the greatest of contemporaneous philosophers has taught us that development proceeds from the indefinite to the definite, and from simplicity to complexity. Why make an exception of Biblical revelation?

Why expect to eliminate from it all elements of perplexity, and all conditions of toiling attention? Why even all possibility of misapprehension? Or why except it from that lower law, as common as it is unflattering to human nature, which leads us to admit that, the more deeply a thing must be sought, the better it is prized?

Suppose we had been given the twenty-third Psalm inscribed by the lightning upon the foreheads of our hills. How soon should we have explained it away as an instance of sub-conscious cerebration? If the soul once dearer to us than our own had returned from the dead to whisper, "Thou shalt not," in some convulsive moral emergency, would it have always found a listener? Alas, would it have always had a welcome?

I think it is possible for us to conceive that it may not be an easy matter for the Almighty to gain a hearing in a human heart, and to understand that any method of communication must have its disadvantages.

That none can be perfect when He has to deal with such imperfect material, is a foregone conclusion. Out of a disabled organ, what master brings the absolute chord?

It is easier to say what the present educated views of inspiration and interpretation are *not*, than what they are. An unclerical writer who should attempt strictly to define the preponderant belief of the church to-day upon a matter so delicate as the nature of Revelation would have a thankless and a useless task.

The curse of all transitional times is upon us: no man represents such a period; none can fitly record it till it is past.

A few things, however, it is possible, with misrepresentation of none, and justice to all, to observe. Progressive Christian scholarship no longer believes in what was called verbal inspiration. We are not taught that the Bible, as a product of inspiration, is a book whose language was originated, corrected, and revised by the divine Author; or, as Webster gives it, "in which the very words and forms of expression of the divine message are communicated to the inspired author."

No truly educated preacher teaches that the awful God, in such a sense, wrote the Song of Solomon. We do not hold that the Almighty troubled himself about the cloak that Paul forgot at Troas. No exegete calls the All-wise Being to account for the discrepancies between Matthew and John. The theory that the mind of God peremptorily dictated the composition of the

Bible, in all its minutiae, as the mind of Shakespeare permeated Hamlet, and the hand of Shakespeare directed it, is a theory already gone with the damnation of infants, and the incredible nonsense known as the doctrine of imputed sin, which would have held you or me responsible for the guilt of Adam.

These things are so well understood by intelligent believers, that any skeptical writer who asserts the contrary foredooms himself to a fine dilemma: he carries upon the face of his assertion proof of an ignorance which unfits him to discuss the subject, or else of a moral obliquity in the representation of facts for which the courtesies of controversy have no permissible name. He either does not know the true, or he circulates the false.

It may be said once again that the most modern Christian scholarship—and, in saying this, I mean even evangelical scholarship—no longer contentedly accepts what is known as plenary inspiration. Plenary inspiration I understand to be the theory that the mind of God, while not dictating the language of the canonical writers, yet exercised a compelling and pervading influence upon them as to motive, matter, and manner; that they were the instruments of His thought, as the keys are of the musician's thought, and that the whole of the Bible, from the Pentateuch to the Apocalypse, is in this sense inspired—the immediate work of the divine Author. Worcester's definition is, "That kind of inspiration which excludes all mixture of error." Professor Parks's theory of inspiration keenly defines it as "such an influence over the writers of the Bible that all their teachings which have a religious character are trustworthy."

One distinguished English clergyman, indeed, is quoted as saying: "Each book [of the Bible] is unique, a solitary miracle of its class in human history." To this an American philosopher in sympathy with what are called the orthodox bodies of believers replies: "These are the assertions of men concerning the Scriptures rather than the assertions of the Scriptures concerning themselves."

It would be easy to cite quotations in harmony with this spirit, but our limits will be crowded without them. It is mainly important, for our purpose here, to understand that the Christianity of to-day is not founded upon imbecile literalism, or hysteric emotionalism, or defunct theology. We are no longer dealing with a stage of religious culture capable of the pious lottery known as sortilege, whereby the accidental turning of a

leaf in the Bible might decide the fate of a life, or of an army. Nor have we to do with the advance of spiritual enlightenment which could lead a father to baptize his baby: "He-that-believeth-not-on-Jesus-Christ-shall-be-damned." Nor with a theory of Biblical interpretation formulated in a theology which could require a girl to declare herself willing to be sent to hell if it were the will of God.

To attack a man for the faith of his great-grandfather is only next to imputing to him the sin of Adam, and ranks the rationalist among the barbarians at whom he sneers.

There is something pathetic in the persistence with which unbelievers of a certain type fire away at buried creeds. It is like a cannonade in a cemetery. Who is hit? Count your bleeding ghosts. Seek not the living among the dead. About face, if you would find a breathing foe!

Intelligent Christians to-day no more suppose that babies go to hell than Strauss did. A growing proportion of such Christians do not believe that the Bible teaches the doctrine of an eternal hell at all. Instructed believers no more think that the majority of the human race are damned than Theodore Parker thought it. Even the representative theologian of the old-school orthodox faith in this country taught in his class-room that the majority of men are saved. The representative theologian of the new school is accustomed, before his students, to compare the number of the lost to the number of the saved as the inmates of our prisons to the population outside of them. The Christian pulpit does not teach that heathen who never heard of Christ cannot be saved. The Christian parish does not learn that faith without character ever carried one single soul to heaven. Nobody claims that mere belief in the redemptive power of Christ counterbalances an evil or a selfish life. No one urges the secondary importance of individual purity and humanity. Christians do not shed tears of remorse for the sin of Eve. We do not believe that hell is a lake of material fire. We do not hold that we are unable to do right when we want to. Few of us think that God willfully foreordained some of His children to endless torture and some to endless peace, and that we cannot help ourselves, but must do as we were predestined to do, and abide the consequences and bless Him for it. We do not believe that saints in heaven are happier for the sight of devils in hell. We do not believe that God gets angry. We do not believe that

Christ died to satisfy the "vengeance" of His loving Father and ours. We do not believe that there is nothing good and beautiful and true in unconverted human nature. We do not believe that there may not be virtue in very bad people. We do not believe that the merciful and marked growth of character, to which the church has given the name of regeneration, must of necessity take the form of a spiritual convulsion and jerk itself under the methods of a revival, or the iron limits of a creed. We do not believe that the Almighty is ignorant of the laws of heredity, or that He overlooks the awful pressure of circumstance on human character. We do not believe that He ever created a soul, the least, the lowest, the most denied, the most sorely bestead by life, and pushed it aside as nature and the modern philosopher do, as an unfit survivor, beneath His careful respect and personal tenderness. We do not believe that He does not love poor wretches better than we do. We do not believe that He will not treat them better than we should. We do not believe, and our scholars do not teach us, that our Bible requires us to believe these things.

Neither do we believe that God made the world in six days of twenty-four hours each; nor that Moses may not have absorbed a great deal of Egyptian culture; nor that the early Jews were not barbarians who acted and were treated accordingly; nor that David and Solomon were ideal modern Christians; nor that Matthew and Luke were skilled as genealogists; nor that the substance of the Golden Rule had never been taught before Christ taught it; nor that Gautama, and Mohammed, and Confucius did not say a great deal that was true. Nor do we assert that Moses and Paul knew as much science as Herbert Spencer; we simply suggest, let me say in passing, that the Omniscient may.

Though at the risk of being met by certain of my fellow-citizens with the historic reply of Priscilla to John Alden, I think I have not ventured too much in saying that, whatever else the Scriptures mean or give to modern belief, these are among the things which they do *not* reveal.

Many of the dogmas attributed to us exist now only upon the lips or the pages of our opponents. Our young people are familiar with them chiefly in skeptical literature.

Our pulpit does not teach them, our pews do not demand them, our press does not circulate them, our scholars smile at

them, our saints have outgrown them. Our exploded theories provide occupation still for anxious and aimless infidels of a certain sort, but Christian scholarship must pass them with the silence which is the only practicable reply of any science to any charlatanism.

Where is the Christian apologist who taunts science with her abandoned outposts? Who accuses her because George Washington was bled to death? Who denounces her because no physician in Europe over the age of forty accepted Harvey's discovery of the circulation of the blood? Yet such jeers were on a level with some of the hue and cry to which scholars like Tischendorf, or Robertson Smith, or Bishop Lightfoot are expected to give chase.

Let us remember that systematic religious belief is a science, as well as botany or physiology; like other sciences subject to human mistake, correction, and slow development; that Revelation has no more done revealing than the cell-theory, or the theory of spontaneously moving plants; and that we are to regard the Bible, not as a splendidly wrought sarcophagus, but as the bed of a deep and magnificent ocean, wherein is hid treasure that the life of a man, or a race, may dive for and not exhaust.

Bearing this clearly in mind, the first thing which we observe about the Bible is that it is a human history, written by men and for men, and to be judged by human standards. Whatever God has to do with it is for us a matter of inference, not of assumption. Whatever be the supernatural element in it, we are to decide as a result, not as a condition, of our study of the book. We are not to bring to this study an *a priori* conviction that the whale did, any more than that he did not, swallow Jonah.

All that any believer in the Bible has a right to ask, or needs to ask, is that it should be subjected to the same historical laws which govern other books. If historical science should do away with the personality of Adam,—what then? The believer should be the last to insist upon it for the truth's sake; the reality of Revelation is not affected by the surrender of this or that trifling detail or theory; it would be ruined by an evasion of truth. If the Bible cannot stand the same tests with other histories, we want to know it, and we want to be the first to know it.

It is the belief of careful Christian scholarship, as it is the concession of the fairest skeptical learning, that the book stands

the test. Renan says of the Gospels: "All, in my judgment, date back to the first century, and they are substantially by the authors to whom they are attributed."

We have a human history of at least equal claims with others; with, at all events, no more than their share of errors, inconsistencies, and difficulties; to be handled with the same critical skill and honor as Josephus and Xenophon and Grote; and was it not Lessing who said: "If Livy and Dionysius and Polybius and Tacitus are so candidly and liberally treated that we do not stretch them on the rack for a syllable, why should not Matthew and Mark and Luke and John be treated as well?"

We shall not, however, quarrel with him who demands that the Scriptures be handled with greater critical skill than other histories; their claims are greater, and may require it; but we insist that, for the same reason, the intellectual *and* moral candor of the critic shall be guarded in proportion to the size of the subject and the cause at stake. No human history has received and endured the critical strain which has been brought to bear upon the Christian Scriptures. A German scholar once wrote a keen little book, in which he applied to the personality of Martin Luther the same kind of historical methods which have been exercised upon that of Christ, thereby proving the general untrustworthiness of the fact of Luther. Another skillful writer has, by a similar treatment, shown, with marked effect, that Cæsar was never assassinated. Whateley's application of this principle to Napoleon is a familiar instance in the same direction.

Whatever Revelation reveals, then, it cannot be too clearly emphasized that it reveals by sifting through the hard, fine sieve of human history. The natural way God chose, and chose it in this most natural form. We have to deal with the records of an ancient people; with their remoteness and barbarism, their politics, progress, and decline; with their superstitions and faith, their virtues and vices, their pretensions and claims; and, further, with whatever moral or spiritual objects the internal evidence of the Book may offer as sufficient reasons for the selection of this particular people for the position of the extraordinary importance which their Scriptures have given them in the world's thought.

The Bible reveals once more, in a degree unequaled by any human production, a power of adaptation to human conscious-

ness. "The Bible *finds* me," said Coleridge, "as nothing else does." Assuming that God had preferred the literary method, and had chosen a collection of Hebrew chronicles, poems, and letters as the medium of communicating to men something of value which Nature had not expressed, it would be expected that He would appeal, so far as His media permitted, to that which underlies all philosophy, and defies all dogmatism. "There is a point of view beyond the sphere of philosophy," says Goethe, "namely, that of common sense." There are a few things about ourselves which we *know*; to these the Bible addresses itself with a subtlety and a force which, to be sure, taken by themselves, it is not necessary to call supernatural, but which certainly transcend anything which we have yet experienced in other literary influences.

Men have misery, an uneasy conscience, disenchantment with life, reluctance to death, desire for eternal existence, and isolation of the soul. We do not turn to our Dante for such a plain, old-fashioned thing as comfort; Goethe has no forgiveness to offer a stained nature shuddering and cowering before itself; Homer lends few illusions to the unconfessed emptiness of our days; Virgil does not draw the sting from the fang of our last hours; Shakespeare cannot promise us immortality, nor draw near to the inner solitude in which all men walk, but the sensitive perish.

Great grief and great guilt drive mankind where they can get something greater. Strong fear and strong hope hold us where we can find something stronger. Sin and suffering are the deepest facts of life. Real emotions are a keen touchstone to the real. The common crises, the plebeian forces, the plain, universal fates and chances, test our prophets and ourselves.

"Though I am a Hellene at heart," confessed the invalid Heine, "the book has not only well entertained me, but also deeply edified me. What a book! . . . The whole drama of humanity (is) in this book. It is the book of books—Biblia."

"Need you ask?" said the dying Scott, when requested to name the book which he would have read. "Need you ask? There is but one."

Quarrel with it as we may, doubt it as we often must, perplexed by it as we shall always be, criticise it as we dare, neglect it as we do, the fact remains, and remains one of august significance, that, in those emergencies of life which are fathoms deep below all intellectual querulousness or self-delusion, the

Bible grasps us as the very hand of God might do, if we could find in this fact alone sufficient proof that the hand of God is in it.

We have our infectious, as well as our incommunicable, doubts. Unbelief is subject to fashions; one may be, to-day, a materialist or a Buddhist—either is *comme il faut*. The scientific pose is so clearly *à la mode*, it would seem strange that it has overlooked in the Bible by far the most important support which can be found for the theories which teach us to believe in the evolution of the race.

Revelation reveals the only clear basis of hope there is that the world can ever become what unbelieving science claims that it will.

Our modern dream of humanity is nothing else than Christianity in a mask domino. The altruism of the prevailing philosophy owes its existence to the principles taught by Jesus, and its influence to the power of His individuality upon the world. What is that audacious fantasy known as the "invention of immortality" but a cheap parody on the splendid Biblical promise of a life hereafter?

Revelation contains the only true democracy. Christ was the first great and consistent communist. Respect for the despised may be said to have originated with him. He first reduced the capricious and inefficient impulses of human sympathy to a permanent force. He taught the inexorable demands of poverty upon possession. He wrought havoc with the criminalities of selfish social ease. He gave challenge to the sloth and the slumber of human fellowship. He preached religious freedom and rebuked superstition.

The deference of strength to weakness, the patience of wisdom with folly, the tenderness of integrity to error, the claims of suffering upon joy, the right of the individual to his own God, were never powerfully formulated and practically illustrated in the same individual until He formulated and illustrated them. The so-called "religion of humanity" is the most amazing theft that the history of philosophy has known. It has stolen from the lips of the Carpenter's Son the principles of human progress, over which a little knot of scholars and scoffers are grouped to-day, with the expression of those who discover the secret of existence. These principles, and these alone, present the only possible chance for the development of

the race from its existing crudeness to the beautiful finish of which materialist and believer dream. The theories of the New Testament contain the seeds of the highest, because the broadest, culture. They respect the people. They build our hospitals, our asylums, our Magdalen homes, our public schools, the scholarships in our great universities; they open the oriental harems to our female physicians, our libraries to day-laborers, our academies to freed slaves, our colleges to women, our republics to their citizens. Blot the philosophy of the Nazarene out of the world, and these things go with it. This philosophy, and this alone, places that importance on the individual which makes personal growth possible upon any such scale as to become general development.

Jesus Christ taught the value of the unit; he gave us this factor in social statics. He represented the enfranchisement of faith; he gave this basis to our spiritual science. Strive as we would, we can no more outgrow our debt to him as a social reformer, or the chief apostle of religious freedom, than the wine can disallow its own grapes, or the rainbow ignore the prism. "Let mental culture go on advancing," admitted Goethe, "let the natural sciences go on gaining in depth and breadth, and the human mind expand as it may, it will never go beyond the elevation and moral culture of Christianity as it glistens and shines forth in the Gospel!"

The remarkable conformity of the Scriptures to personal consciousness and to universal history is an important argument in favor of the reality of the Biblical claims, but does not seem to be a final one. Let it meet the individual or the general needs with whatever force or subtlety, the demands of this Book are so tremendous, if false they are so preposterous, that it ought to be subjected to every test of intellect and conscience that we can bring to bear upon it.

If we can find anything else professing to be a revelation from God which is less perplexing, more simple, more reasonable, we should be bound to drop this. "Give me a better book, and I will," was the profound reply of a Christian who was asked to surrender the Bible.

Candid unbelievers readily acknowledge the superiority of the Christian to all other Scriptures. Uncandid ones admit the same by the virulence and persistence of their defiance to the Bible.

"There is no recognition in the Koran of human brotherhood." Many orientalists claim that Buddhism gives us no personal god. The Edda, and the Zend Avesta, and the Vedas give too many gods. The Sacred Books of Confucius offer little or no hope of immortality. It is not too much to say that, on the whole, and to the best of our knowledge and belief, tested by that consensus of the intelligent and devout which alone is competent to pass judgment upon a question in which the spiritual faculties as well as the reasoning must be qualified jurors, our Bible reveals the best explanation we have of the phenomena of life.

It is a mysterious one, it is an imperfect one, it is a half-developed one, but it is the best we have. It is the best we have, because it is the most humane; therefore, in so far, the most divine. It is the most humane and the most divine because it reveals the relation of Jesus Christ to the problem of existence.

To practical people of instructed intelligence, but not of the theological or metaphysical temperaments which will amuse themselves with the casuistries of the thing to the end of human leisure, it seems to me that the whole matter resolves itself into something like this:

We are here, we know not how or why. We are in a world of certain misery and uncertain pleasure. Life is a dark marvel. Death is a blind leap. The future is silent. God is a mystery. Nature is terrible. Why are we thrust, the pawns in an awful game? Why, why were we tossed, the weeds on a fathomless sea? What did the Creator of the earth mean by so seemingly cruel a waste of human sensitiveness and force? Who can find Him reasons for an apparently merciless venture at world-making? Here comes calmly upon our bluster and battle a Book whose history is so singular that its unique pretensions scarcely excite our surprise, however they influence our credulity.

It assumes to declare to us the existence of a wise and affectionate God, whose children we are, and whose purposes to us it partially explains. It presumes to treat us as immortal souls. It dares to promise us eternal life. It delights to offer us that satisfaction of body, mind, and spirit known as heaven. It does not shrink from foretelling the moral consequences of evil in this or any world. It allures us to purity. It would comfort us in sorrow. It would save us from despair. It would stimulate confidence in the Author of life, and our

trust in that sequel to it which follows death. It is true that this book fails to tell us why God made the world at all. It is as silent as reason, it is as dumb as the stars, upon this tremendous question. It is, possibly, one of the objects of our existence to learn that we are too small to ask a question of this size; that divine motives are not material for human grasp, like fossils, or mollusks, or typhoid fever. However that may be, the Bible meets us squarely upon the deepest and the highest question which the finite intellect has the right to ask: What, having made us at all, is God's moral attitude toward us? When He thrust into space this quivering ball of pain and error, did He mean well enough by it to justify the deed?

Profounder than all our philosophy, wiser than all our protest, comes the sublime and solitary answer: "*He so loved the world that He gave His only Son.*"

This magnificent reply, which theology has distorted out of its grand and simple proportions, to which science has refused its supreme reasonableness, the true human heart and the clear human head have accepted. The contortions of faith and the malice of doubt have almost equally united to shake the hold of this great re-assurance upon the world. The world will have it in spite of both. The world will have it, because it is the best it can get; and by all the iron laws of common sense it will keep the best till God or man can offer it something better.

The Bible, then, we say, is a mysterious book; as yet possibly a misunderstood, certainly an ill-understood, one; it has been as much abused as used; it has cloaked amazing error and shielded incredible crime; it has been the object of idolatrous worship and of infernal hate; it has aroused almost all the passions of humanity. The crude, emotional stages of the world's life have spent themselves upon it, like weather on a rock. Now, as we approach the ages of disciplined thought and deepened spiritual forces, the form of the conflict will change only as much as it must intensify. Already we tread a new earth, and before we have done with this "obsolete" book, we shall behold new heavens. Constellations which we now think to be there shall be found long since extinct; it is the glitter, not the star, we see. Systems now dark to our keenest telescope shall sweep shining into their seemingly vacant places; where we have blackness, we shall know light.

Far be it from me to involve any other believer in an individual conviction, or to claim to represent the shifting and various phases of faith in the Christian church to-day, by a personal theory of inspiration, when I say that the Bible of the future must be interpreted, chiefly, as a Biography.

The day may come when our views of the divine purpose, as exemplified in the Old Testament, will receive even more modification than they already have, and that is very great.

"There is no such reverential use of the truth as a bold use of it," finely says President Bascom. "No other use implies the same confidence in it."

The time may be at hand—not when all element of the supernatural shall be eliminated from a work which, so far as we can now see, must retain a measure of it as a countersign of its sacred and exceptional errand—but when the proportions of that element shall be perceptibly decreased. If the Jewish Scriptures should come to be regarded, mainly, as the religious and political records of a people whose national importance the events of the New Testament, and these alone, explain; if we find ourselves led to subject their legends and miracles to the same intelligent tests by which we have already tried their cosmogony and chronology, and if the one should share in large measure the same fate that has overtaken the other; though Eden were an allegory, and though God never told Abraham to kill Isaac, and though we were obliged to consider it doubtful whether Samson slew a thousand men with the jaw-bone of an ass,—the value of the Bible would be no more infringed than the glory of the moon is affected by the "discouraging condition" of lunar theories, concerning which a scientific student tells us that her "actual place in the heavens is now so different from her calculated place that a sailor would be misled by it, as to his longitude, five miles."

If, indeed, we come at length to prize the Old Testament,—for its matchless devotional literature, to be sure, its august historic associations and profound ministry to certain forms of human need, but mainly because it represents the genealogical stage of that great Memoir whose central Figure is the hope of the world,—the power of the Bible will no more be lost than the color of the rose was lost by the discovery of the metamorphosis of plants. That majestic Figure remains, and the details of its history advance with increasing literary and moral effect, through

the precious pages of the New Testament, to their climax. The Gospels tell the story and report the instruction of Christ. The Epistles formulate his theology. The Apocalypse is a vision of the final mystery to which all fact and all faith are tending—a vision seen by the soul that He loved best, and that may have, must have, absorbed most of the miracle of His nature.

The Biography marches on, with splendid disregard of all petty criticisms, to its great historical and ethical ends. God used such material as He had. He seems to have cared chiefly to select men who would not lie, and trusted the necessary imperfections of such a work, performed by such instruments as He could get, to the good sense of mankind.

One might almost say that it does not seem to have occurred to the Great Compiler of these scattered records that the world would ever question the main purpose or use of the Bible, because the Jews killed their captives or Matthew made a mistake in a genealogical table! How small, beside the loftiness of the divine plan which overrode the human grouping of these humanly written records, shows the peevish spirit which demands that He weed the human out of them, and because He did not, dares Him to prove that He had anything to do with them at all!

Whatever the future of Biblical exegesis may bring forth, it is difficult to see reason for believing that the miracles of the New Testament will ever be entirely "explained away"; though that may be a piece of private conservatism. We have no more right, as has been well suggested, to assume that there can be no miracle, than that there can. The facts, and the facts alone, must make the theory. The scientific basis of thought has taught us as much as this. Let Christianity be too apt a pupil to forget it. The evidential proofs that Jesus possessed supernatural powers seem so far to rest where the other historical proof of the narrative does; and so far both, or neither, are to be accepted. But even supposing that candid and devout scholarship should eventually leave us little of these miraculous incidents except the great fact and symbol of the Resurrection, it is certain that we should not lose our Bible with them. We should lose nothing unless we lost the Christ. *He* is the miracle. Revelation reveals Him. He is the message of God to man. Through Him is the divine law offered to human obedience. By Him all that it has pleased the Ruler of the world to explain of His moral

government is expressed. Jesus Christ is Revelation, and Revelation is Jesus Christ.

The famous and familiar words of Lecky come with more force to us, just here, than any Christian estimate of this sacred personality could exert:

"It was reserved for Christianity to present to the world an ideal character which, through all the changes of eighteen centuries, has filled the hearts of men with an impassioned love. . . . It may be truly said that the simple record of three short years of active life has done more to regenerate and soften mankind than all the disquisitions of philosophers, and than all the exhortations of moralists."

What this principle of regeneration means to the race it is impossible for any one not a student of human history ignorantly to describe. What this means to the individual soul it is preposterous for any one not in personal *rapport* with Christ and his teachings ignorantly to decide.

Here we enter a phase of the argument where a certain advance in spiritual culture is clearly essential to discussion; and here those who have, and they who have not, a consciousness of their own spiritual natures, and of the famished needs and disused powers which throb through them, must stand apart.

Revelation reveals less science, less dogmatic theology, less miracle than we used to think, but more of Christ. The Bible is a frame of which he is the picture. We have no right to turn from it till we have received into, and tested by our own, that marvelous and mystic life.

When we have absorbed within ourselves his wide-reaching philosophy, his awful personal purity, his organic humanity, his supreme unselfishness,—then, and not till then, shall we have that ethical illumination which will intellectually fit us to deny that the Bible reveals the Science of Life.

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